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At home with the Hart's Tongue

R. C. BENEDICT.

To the writer's mind the hart's tongue is the most interesting of all our American ferns. It is probably not the rarest; certainly it is not the most beautiful, but there is a charm about it in its exclusiveness and its odd appearance which render it distinct. Probably added to this, in the writer's mind is the fact that it grows in the limestone hills of his home section of Central New York which a boyhood of tramping after wild flowers and ferns made especially cherished in memory.

The hart's tongue became an object of interest to me through the accounts of it in Parsons' "How to Know the Ferns" which indeed made all the ferns described interesting. With knowledge that it grew in the Jamesville region a few miles southeast of my home town I began to tramp frequently in that direction and to look as I found later, in the most unlikely places for it. For a while I examined almost every plant of broad-leaved sedge along the roadside. I was the veriest beginner. I discovered afterward that it was too exclusive to frequent the roadside.

Finally I found it after a long day's tramp in the region west of Jamesville. I had hunted for it all day without success, and was making all speed to get back to the road where I had left my wheel. The description of this locality will furnish a good idea of all the stations for hart's tongue in the Jamesville region. I had reached the edge of a ledge of limestone overlooking a small valley. The limestone dropped twenty to fifty feet or more in places to a steep talus of large sharp chips of the limestone. Below the talus sloped steeply to the bottom of the valley two hundred feet or more below. The top of the talus slope was fairly open with a few scattered butternuts and basswoods.



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Fifty feet from the foot of the ledge, however, began a dense growth of white cedar through which one had to push by main force, and as the rocks of the talus were heavily moss-covered, and rotting logs were everywhere, traveling was several degrees harder than walking down stairs.

I came that afternoon to the top of that ledge in a particular hurry. My wheel was at the foot of the slope and I had then several miles of hilly road to supper. There happened to be a break in the ledge at that particular point and I climbed down that and was perhaps twenty feet down the open part of the talus when I stopped, no longer in a hurry. There was a plant of hart's tongue with its leaves pushing up perpendicularly from the slope of forty-five degrees. The roots were a pocket of soil covered by fragments of the limestone which is very loose at the top of such a talus and furnishes insecure footing. Before I went home I had seen probably forty plants of the fern. Afterwards, on later trips I found stations containing two or three times as many plants. Always they occurred in similar situations, near the top of a steep talus, with a ledge above, and a dense shrubby growth below which served as an admirable protection from the ordinary trampler. One exception may be noted where a few stunted plants were found at the top of a ledge on the sides of crevices several feet deep. I found the last mentioned station in a snow storm in weather too cold to allow an ordinary camera shutter to work properly.

The plant illustrated grew in a station not far from the first one found. The picture which was taken about the middle of June, shows the evergreen last year's leaves sloping down the face of the rock by which this particular plant grew. In the lower right corner of the picture is a leaf of *Cystopteris bulbifera* which luxuriates everywhere along the talus with leaves two

and three feet long. There are quantities also of Herb Robert. The oak-leaved plant is a composite whose name I do not remember. Below the hart's tongue, in the cedar thickets were occasional sods of thick moss covered with numerous fine plants of *Camptosorus*. Not very many other species of ferns grew in the immediate neighborhood of the hart's tongue, but below in the valley there was a very good assortment. My story would not be complete here unless I tell how many kinds I have found in how restricted an area. I think I could now after a sufficient number of swings, drive a couple of golf balls so that the triangle between their starting and stopping places would enclose twenty-five kinds.*

The station I first found has since disappeared from causes I do not know. Perhaps trees fell so as to leave the slope too open and exposed to the sun. Perhaps others found it, and collected too many plants. I collected one plant for my fern garden when I first found the place, but afterward swore off taking plants as too liable to lead to the extinction of the stations, and I would not now take any one to see the fern growing except with the understanding that only leaves would be collected. With such an understanding I should like to be one of a group of the members of the Society to make a trip to the Jamesville region some summer.

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A peculiar form of *Pellaea atropurpurea* Link.

F. L. PICKETT.

On a limestone ledge, known locally as Cedar Cliff, about three miles northwest of Harrodsburg, Monroe County, Indiana, the Cliff Brake, *Pellaea atropurpurea* Link., is found growing luxuriantly and abundantly.

*One ought to drive a golf ball at least two hundred yards.